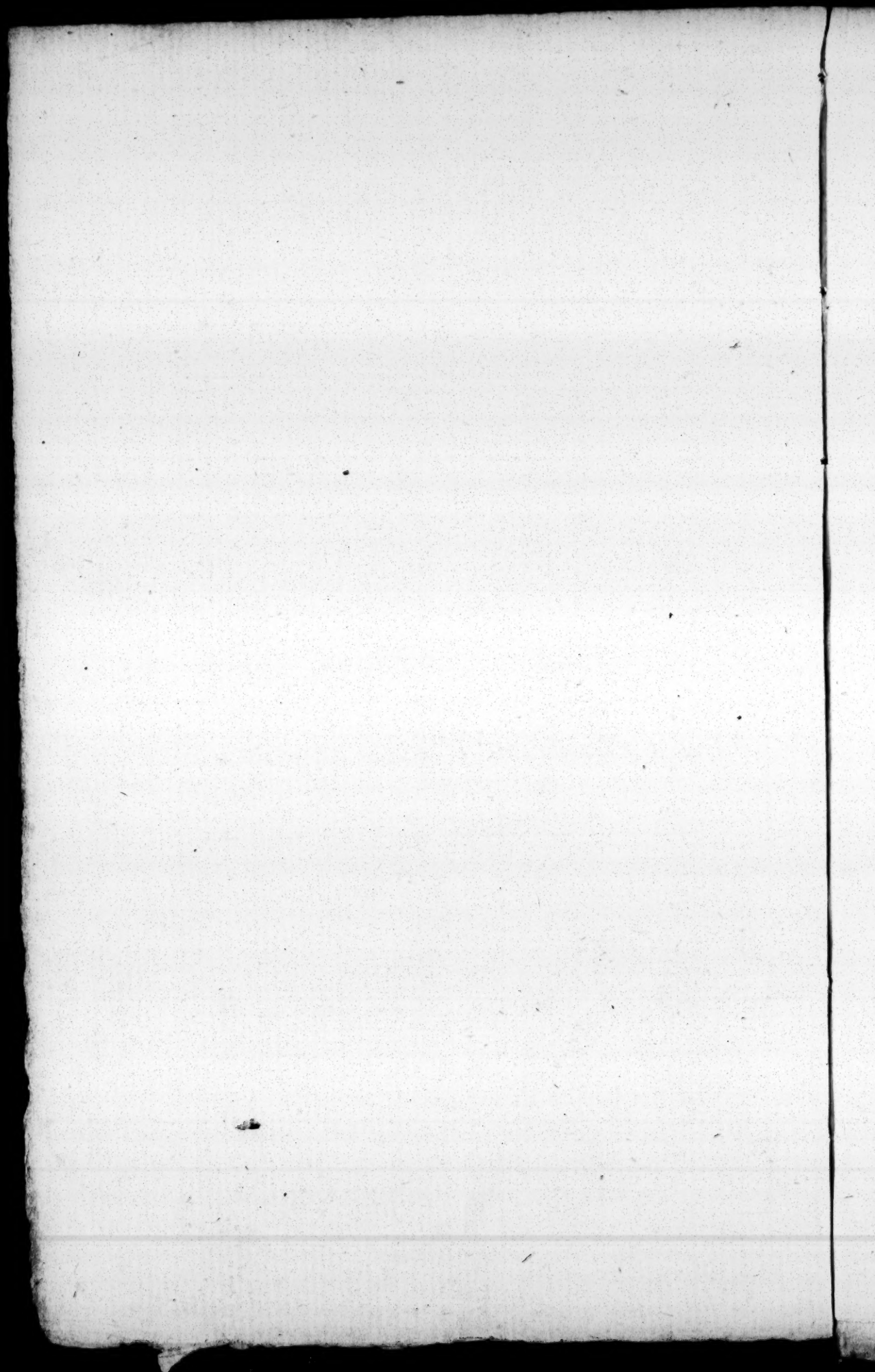

A SHORT and TRUE
STANDARD, &c.

1788.



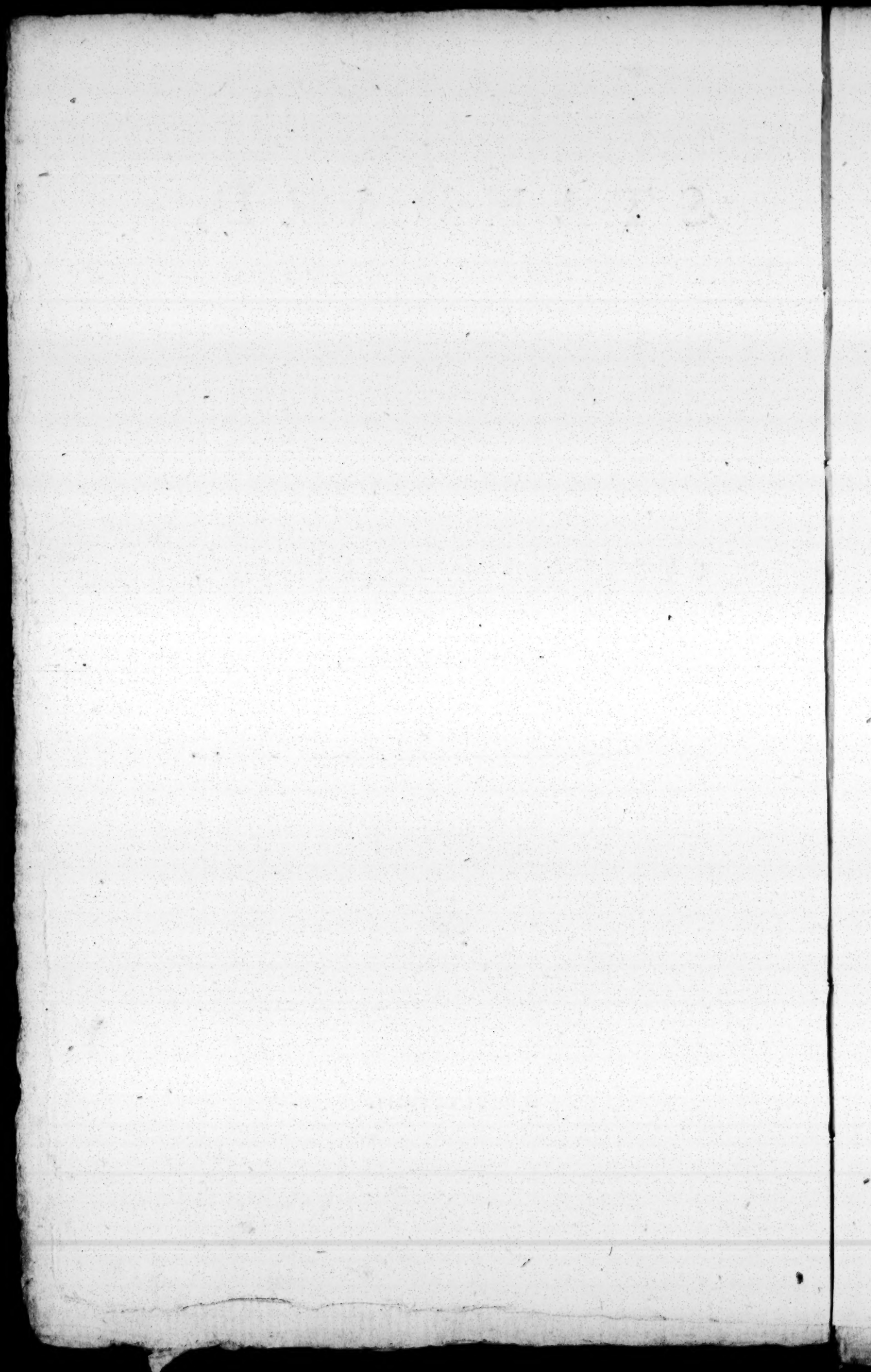
A SHORT and TRUE
STANDARD,

By which to try and judge of
The SAVING EFFICACY
OF THE SEVERAL
SYSTEMS of RELIGION

Embraced by Men.



MDCCLXXXVIII.



A SHORT and TRUE
STANDARD, &c.

BY the religion of Protestants I do not understand the Doctrines of Luther or Calvin or Malancthon, or the Confession of Augusta or Geneva, nor the Catechism of Hildeburg, nor the Articles of the Church of England, no, nor the harmony of Protestant Confession; but that wherein they all agree, and which they all subscribe with greater harmony, as a perfect rule of their faith and actions, that is, the Bible. The Bible, I say, the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants. Whatsoever else they believe besides it and the plain and irrefragable indubitable consequences of it,

well may they hold it as matter of opinion ; but as matter of faith and religion neither can they with coherence to their own grounds believe it themselves, nor require the belief of it of others without most high and most sumptuous presumption. I, for my part, after a long and (as I verily believe and hope) impartial search of *the true way to eternal happiness*, do profess plainly that I cannot find any rest for the sole of my foot but upon *this rock only*. In a word, *there is no sufficiency, but of Scripture only*, for any considering man to build upon.

CHURCHILL.

THE Bible is the only sure foundation upon which they (the Clergy) ought to build every article of their faith which they profess, every point of Doctrine which they teach. All other foundations, whether they be the decisions of Councils, the Confessions of Churches, the

Prescripts of Popes, or the Expositions of private men, ought to be considered by them as sandy and unsafe, as in no wise fit to be ultimately relied on.

The effect of the established systems in obstructing truth, is to the last degree deplorable; every one sees it in other Churches, but scarce any one suspects it in his own.

Collection of Theological Tracts by

R. WATSON,

Lord Bishop of Llandaff.

I PRESUME there is not one sentiment which men of most if not all sects of religion unite in and subscribe to more than this, viz. that those who adhere to what they have embraced may be saved thereby, not excepting even that of the Mahometan. For a sensible and candid man at least to deny this would expose himself to censure, as deficient in that Catholic opinion which men expect he

hold and maintain. And it must be owned, that this is certainly pleasing to a benevolent mind that wishes the salvation of all his fellow creatures; but on investigating and tracing its consequences, possibly some of them will not be allowed by many who hold it, when pressed hard with them.

SECT. 1. For if any man or many men may be saved upon believing in, and adhering to, the Doctrines and Institutes of religion in which they are educated or voluntarily embrace, but not those which are contained in the New Testament, it will follow, that it is of no real consequence which of the systems it is; for if any one or more may be saved thereby, then every one of them may who adheres to that he lives under. For if it is granted that any one or more of them may obtain that end thereby, then all may, as being equally efficacious to save each one or none. The system of religion any persons embrace, how much soever it differs in its doctrines

doctrines, &c. from that of another, is efficacious thereto to those who adhere to it. The efficacy of the Mahomedan religion, for instance, to answer that end, must be admitted of as well as that of the Papists, or of any one of the Protestants whose doctrines, &c. are not contained in the New Testament.

SECT. 2. But further, it will also follow, that the inefficacy of the Mahomedan religion to save men is not to be placed to the account of its doctrines, &c. but to its not being adhered to by those who live under it. This cannot but be admitted upon the sentiment we are considering, which allows that some of those who believe in, and adhere to them, may be saved thereby, but this applies to and includes every one of them, or none. For if it is denied to be efficacious to every one of them who adheres thereto, it must likewise to individuals; and therefore cannot

fe but be inconsistent with the opinion we are speaking of.

The same reasoning and the like consequences will also follow, as it respects the religion of the Papists as well as each one of the Protestants, whose doctrines, &c. are not founded in the New Testament. For tho' either of the systems of religion of the Protestants may not equally differ from the last-mentioned; yet so far as they do, the reasoning holds good, as it respects the sentiment we are mentioning. For if a man may be saved by adhering to either of the Protestants whose doctrines, &c. are not contained in the New Testament, I presume that no substantial reason or argument can be offered to prove it will not equally apply to the religion of Mahomed, or the Papists.

SECT 3. But again, I observe it follows, that the importance of the system of religion of the two latter are in this respect owned to be upon a level with either of
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the Protestants whose doctrines, &c. are not found in the New Testament, because being saved is the ultimatum of each of them; also and therefore if the others are allowed to be efficacious to obtain that end, what we have observed ought to be admitted. If a Protestant denies that efficacy to the Mahomedan, because its doctrines, &c. differ essentially from those contained in the New Testament, he must give up what he allowed, viz. that some men of all religions may be saved by adhering to that they live under; or if they are saved it is by a system of religion they do not embrace. In consequence of which denial, the Protestant must also grant that the Papists are not saved by their religion, because he believes that most of its doctrines, &c. also differ very essentially from those contained in the New Testament, and consequently what he allows, viz. that those of that religion who adhere to it may likewise be saved thereby. For

if in general they are not saved by adhering to it, then no one can; because, as we observed, if it is efficacious to save one or a few, then many or all of them may.

SECT. 4. Further, upon the sentiment we are mentioning, it follows, that the real cause why the Papists are not all saved by their religion, who adhered to it, does not, as was observed, arise from the insufficiency of its doctrines, &c. but to men's not conforming to it. For were that the real efficient cause, it applies to all who live under it, as well as to individuals, and, *vice versa*, this reasoning holds good of all other systems of religion, whose doctrines, &c. are not found in the New Testament; because, as was noticed, though some of them do not equally differ from those contained therein, yet they do in their degree wherein they are not those of the sacred writings. Even that of the Mahomedan contains some doctrines that are to be found in those records, as well as
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the Papists, &c. This reasoning therefore, it must be admitted, applies to each one of the Protestants, or to neither of the others. If it holds in any one system of religion of the Protestants, whose doctrines are not those of the New Testament, such cannot but admit the same consequences concerning themselves as they do of the Papists, &c. for reasons already offered.

If the doctrines, &c. of the Papists, &c. so far as they are not contained in the New Testament, are therefore not efficacious to save men, it will follow, as Paul affirms, viz. they are only wood, hay, &c. as additions to, and built upon, the true and only foundation laid in the New Testament. This includes each of the tenets, rites, and ceremonies, which are the appointments of men. Consequently it follows, that infant sprinkling, as one of that of the Papists, as well as that of most of the Protestants, cannot be efficacious to save the infant, or admit it into the kingdom

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dom of Christ here, no more than the rite of purgatory can save the man who dies a sinner. For if the Protestant denies that efficacy to the latter, because it is an invention of men and not an institution of God, it will equally apply to the former on the same account.

SECT. 5. If the foregoing reasoning is justly founded, it seems to follow unavoidably that it is really inconsistent for the persons whom we are speaking of, to attempt to convert any one from the religion he has embraced as different from that of his own; as for instance, that of Mahometism or the Papists, in order to his being saved; because such a person we suppose admits that some who adhere to either may be saved thereby; and then, as was observed, all others of them may likewise; and consequently he must allow, that those of them who are not saved, it does not arise from the inefficacy of the religion which he already embraces, but to his not adhering
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to it. But must it not then appear highly unreasonable and incongruous for a man of that sentiment to attempt to convert any one from that religion which he owns, nay maintains, he may be saved by, to conform to his own, which holds out to him only the same benefit to be thereby received? Consequently, he has no better or more substantial reason or argument to offer why the other should make such a change, than he has to abide by that he has before adhered to. For the only rational ground or reason why a man attempts to convert another from that religion which he professes, to embrace his own, as far as they differ in their doctrines, &c. is that thereby he may be saved. But this is repugnant to the sentiment such a man maintains, who allows that men of all religions may thereby be saved. And yet how many are there who hold this opinion, that exert their utmost by writing, preaching, and conversation, to effect the conversion of
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men from another system of religion to their own; and likewise blame men of other religions for not being converted to that which they plead for. Nay, many go so far as to sentence them to the everlasting displeasure of God for such a refusal, even without any other remedy than that which they propose to them, though not founded in the New Testament, any more than that of the others. But surely this conduct, when judged of by their own concessions, must appear egregiously inconsistent and absurd; because at certain times they plead for and defend the contrary sentiment, and not only so, but even censure others for not possessing the same Catholic opinion with themselves, viz. that some of all religions will or may be saved thereby.

SECT. 6. If the foregoing reasoning is really conclusive against the sentiment under consideration, it seems to follow indisputably, that men living under either of the systems of religion we have mentioned, if
adhered

adhered to, have no just reason to be solicitous to enquire into, or attempt to form any accurate judgment of the truth or falsehood of the doctrines, &c. of any other to be saved thereby; because it is admitted, that by any one we have noticed, some and therefore all may be saved upon conforming to either of them. Were these persons to abide by the consequence of their opinion, as has been mentioned, it ought to put a final stop to each ones writing and pleading in favour of ~~their~~ *his* own religion, either in defending it against that of any other, or in propagating it amongst men in order to their being saved. Every attempt of this kind must appear inconsistent with their own avowed opinion, and therefore utterly needless, if not impertinent.

SECT. 7. This sentiment we are opposing, in its consequences puts an entire end to every dispute and controversy amongst different sects or denominations
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(whose doctrines, &c. are not contained in the New Testament) concerning whether their religion or that of another's is best calculated to save men, seeing it is owned by each one of that opinion, that the religion of each is efficacious to obtain that end, if adhered to. And yet the very reverse to this, is the universal and constant practice of very many of each. For either of them, whose doctrines, &c. are not those of the New Testament, to plead that theirs is efficacious, or the most so, and therefore to be preferred, is putting in a weak claim, seeing that each sect asserts and maintains the like of that they embrace. Besides, we are supposing that each one grants the same of another's system of religion, so far as that a man may be saved thereby, though he does not embrace that which he is persuading him to receive.

SECT. 8. But I add, if according to the decided judgment of the writers of the
New

New Testament, the doctrines, &c. given by Moses to the Jews, from God, could not save those who lived under it, but that they were to obtain it by the Gospel only, both of which they certainly assert, it seems to follow with a clearness of evidence not to be consistently denied, that the doctrines, &c. contained in a system of religion compiled by men, whether by Mahomed, the Papist, or the Protestant, cannot be admitted to be more efficacious, if so much, to save men who adhere to either, than that of Moses, or equal to that contained in the New Testament. For whoever affirms that either of them mentioned above may produce that effect to those who adhere to either of them, must certainly maintain that either of them is superior to that of Moses to save men, and equal to that of the latter. Whoever admits that by the law of Moses, men could not be saved, cannot, consistent therewith, plead that a system of religion composed by Mahomed,

homed, &c. is efficacious to obtain that end by those who adhere to either, seeing it was not to be had by the former.

If he affirms that either of those just mentioned, are equally efficacious with that contained in the New Testament, then what St. Paul says concerning justification by the law of Moses is true here, that Christ died in vain. These are consequences which I presume will follow, or it must be allowed that the doctrines, &c. of Mahomed, &c. are inefficacious to save any who adhere to either system of religion. Consequently, it appears strongly to militate against the sentiment under consideration, viz. that men may be saved by adhering to each system of religion we have mentioned.

SECT. 9. To be more explicit and particular. The above reasoning will undoubtedly apply to a system of religion, suppose that of the Quakers, in which neither Baptism nor the Lord's Supper constitute

stitute any part of it, and also to each of those in which a substitution of one or both of them takes place, by a rite or rites, instead of either or both, of human appointment, which thereby suppresses, or in effect repeals one or both of them. If either of these systems of religion is allowed to be efficacious to save men who adhere thereto, it will follow that any other system of religion which leaves out or suppresses that of faith in Christ, with those institutes just mentioned, is alike capable to save men, if they conform to it, as is acknowledged by those we are speaking of respecting that of Mahomed. For those rituals are as much inseparable from, and constituent parts of that of the New Testament, as faith in Christ. To urge against this conclusion, that the former are rites of a positive nature, but that the latter is not, and therefore that the others may be left out or suppressed or changed, but this cannot, proves too much, because that is a declared

red condition or requirement whereby to be saved, is also a positive appointment contained therein, tho' of a different nature or kind; likewise its efficacy to that end equally depends upon the will of God, and like the others is a constituent part of that religion; and therefore, if the others may, this also may be left out or suppressed or changed in a system of religion by which men may be saved, who adhere to it and vice versa.

SECT 10. Another consequence arising from the opinion we are adverting to, is, that the doctrines, &c. of the religion contained in the New Testament are hereby virtually denied to be the alone Standard, or only infallible rule, by which to decide what is indispensibly required and obligatory on those who possess it whereby to be saved; and yet the contrary to this is not only the professed sentiments of Chillingworth and Watson, but it is the unanimous opinion subscribed to by all sects who profess

fess the Christian religion, at least by those of Protestants. Were this given up, it would follow that there are other names besides that of Christ, i. e. his doctrines, &c. by which men may be saved ; but this is contrary to the explicit declaration of an inspired Apostle. But this consequence seems to be undeniable, if men may be saved by believing in, and obeying a system of religion in which each of those appointments just mentioned are not contained, or wherein a substitution of one or all of them takes place ; for then those contained in the New Testament are not the alone rule, or Standard, by observing which men may be saved, but that end may be attained by other appointments. Which not only so far nullifies them relative to that end, but places those which are of human institution and authority only upon a level with them, as alike or rather more efficacious to obtain that end.

If the foregoing reasoning is not justly
founded

founded and supported, it will also follow that all the other doctrines, &c. that are peculiar to, and constituent parts of the religion of the New Testament, containing the declared way or medium, by adhering to which men may be saved, may be omitted or left out of a system of religion by which men may obtain that end by conforming to it, and consequently it directly terminates in natural religion only, or that which a rational and consistent Deist believes in and pleads for. Whoever therefore would effectually avoid an opinion which eventually, and its direct consequences, pleads for and supports the cause of Deism, must confine his Standard of the doctrines, &c. by observing which men may be saved, to those only contained in the New Testament.



